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No. 47



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Dekadrachms by Kimon and Evaenetos, 412-385 B. C.

The Coins of Syracuse

IN the beauty and variety of its types and in brilliancy of execution the coinage of Syracuse excelled that of any other Greek city. Issued through a period of three hundred years, her coins illustrate all but completely the development of this art in Greece, and include what are universally acknowledged to be the greatest masterpieces in the whole history of coinage. Their designs, considered as miniature reliefs, reflect the spirit and illustrate the technical progress of the higher art of sculpture from the period of archaic severity through the culmination in the second half of the fifth century to the age of decline. Many of them have also an intimate connection with the political history of this, the richest and most powerful state in the western Greek world. Their appeal is thus not to the numismatist alone; they are of importance to the student of Greek history, and, being authenticated *original* works, they transmit to us the

spirit of the art of the fifth century more directly and truly than do the Roman copies upon which we have so largely to rely for our knowledge of the statues of the greatest sculptors.

The Museum possesses a rich collection of these Syracusan coins which have now for the first time been brought together into one series, and are exhibited in the Fifth Century Room in the Classical Wing. With two or three exceptions, all the important types are represented by finely preserved specimens. Thirty of the coins were formerly exhibited as a part of the Catharine Page Perkins Collection. To these are now added nineteen coins from the Bartlett Gift (1903), and ninety-four from the Greenwell-Warren Collection, most of them purchased in 1904 from the bequest of Henry L. Pierce, others acquired since from the James Fund. One specimen is a recent gift of Mr. E. A. Wyeth. In these pages only a few typical examples are illustrated with a brief historical discussion. For fuller information, those who are interested in



1 2
Tetradrachms, about 500 B. C.

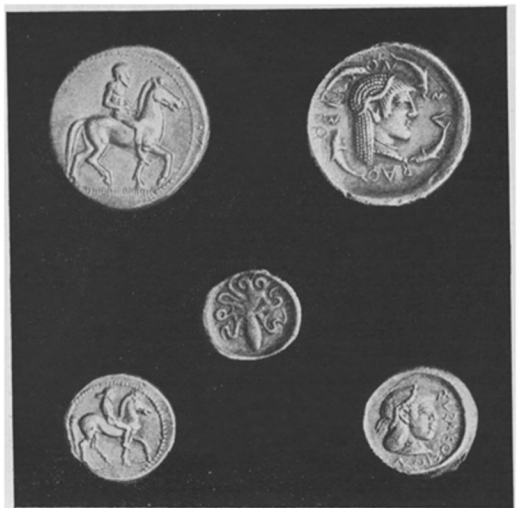
the subject should consult the monographs of Head, Evans and Hill, on which the following account is largely based.*

The technique of gem engraving, which is precisely the same as that used for engraving the metal coin dies, was highly developed in Greece in Mycenaean times, and was never wholly lost in the dark ages which followed. But coinage, or the custom of stamping a design upon a piece of metal as an official guarantee that it is of standard weight, goes back apparently only to the beginning of the seventh century B. C. These facts go far to explain the striking discrepancy between the artistic excellence of the designs on Greek coins and the careless, even primitive methods by which these designs were stamped upon the metal blanks. Many details of the process, which can only be briefly described here, are illustrated in the collection. The lower or *obverse* die was fixed in an anvil, and the heated lump of metal placed upon it. The upper or *reverse* die, which at first bore only a rude design, usually a square divided into four parts, was held above the blank and impressed into it by repeated blows of a hammer. The dies, which were made of some soft metal, wore out quickly and had often to be replaced, a fact which helps to explain the great variety of types. Some coins show that the dies had cracked (see No. 15). Since no collar was used, the edges are generally irregular; coins of the same weight vary greatly in diameter and thickness, and the design is frequently not in the centre of the coin. Then, again, unless great care was exercised the blank might move, with the result that the coins were double-struck. In many examples the metal is split at the edges (see Nos. 63 and 65). Often traces of the original shape of the blanks may be detected. These seem to have been spherical, and to have been cast in moulds made in two halves. If these halves did not fit closely the metal flowed into the joint between them, forming a projecting ridge. The blank was usually placed with this ridge in a vertical plane, with the result that in the finished coin two small projections remain (e. g. Nos. 4, 16, 55 and 67). When the ridge was placed hori-

zontally it is preserved all around the edge of the coin (e. g. No. 53). These and similar peculiarities due to careless striking are found on most Greek coins throughout the best period. Marked improvement in this respect is to be observed in the coins of the Hellenistic age, while the bronze medallions of the Roman emperors approach still more nearly to the technical perfection of modern coins.

Syracuse was late in establishing an independent coinage. The earliest issues of which we have knowledge belong to the closing years of the sixth century. On the obverse is the representation of a four-horse chariot, the horses advancing at a walk. The reverse has only the primitive incuse square divided into four parts. This issue is as yet known only in one example. Soon, as on the first two coins in our collection (Nos. 1 and 2), a small female head within a depressed circle is introduced in the centre of the square. This head gradually increases in importance till the time of the dekadrachms of Kimon and Evænetos, when it comes to occupy the obverse.

The next series, illustrated by twenty-seven coins (Nos. 3-29), can be more definitely dated and brought into connection with an important historical figure. In 485 B. C. Gelon, the ruler of Gela, took advantage of the struggle between the nobles and the popular party to establish himself as tyrant of Syracuse, which he governed with such success that before his death, in 478, he had made it the greatest of Sicilian cities. A patron of the arts, like most of the tyrants of his day, he issued coins which in some respects were hardly excelled by any of the later series. The rude incuse square on the reverse is discarded. The head is increased in size and surrounded by the letters of the inscription and by four dolphins, with admirable decorative



12 27 8
26 26
Coins of Gelon, 485-478 B. C.

* B. V. Head, *On the Chronological Sequence of the Coins of Syracuse*. A. J. Evans, *Syracusan Medallions and their Engravers*. G. F. Hill, *Coins of Ancient Sicily*.



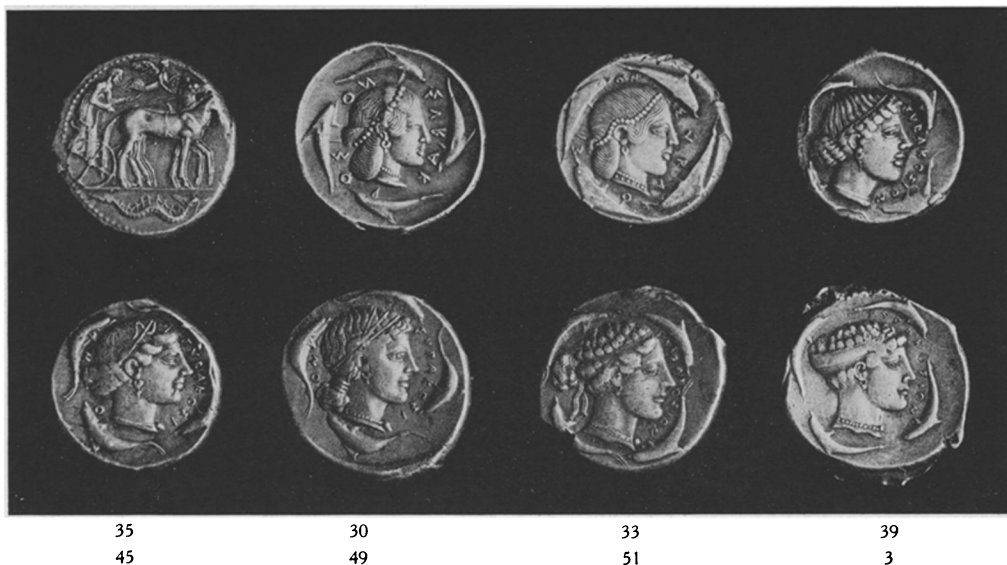
Tetradrachms of Gelon, 485-478 B. C.

effect. In the earliest examples (see No. 4) it is also encircled by a faint, raised line recalling the depressed circle of the earlier issue. On the obverse of the tetradrachms the race horses become more spirited and lifelike. The difficulty of rendering four horses abreast is still met by an expedient which is common also on the marble reliefs of this period. Only two horses of the team are represented, the remaining two being indicated in outline beside the first pair. The winged Victory hovering in the field above and placing a crown upon the heads of the horses, a new feature both at Syracuse and at Gela, doubtless commemorates Gelon's successes at the great festivals of Olympia and Delphi. He is recorded to have been victorious with a quadriga at Olympia in 488, and to have set up there a bronze chariot group celebrating the event. The famous bronze charioteer found at Delphi may perhaps belong to a similar group erected soon after his death in honor of a Delphian victory. The greatest military achievement of Gelon is also commemorated by his coinage. His crushing defeat of the Carthaginians in the battle of Himera (480 B. C.) saved the cause of Greek civilization in the West, and must be ranked with the more famous battles of Salamis and Plataea. The Carthaginians, we are told, in gratitude for intercession on their behalf by Demareta, the wife of Gelon, presented her with a crown of gold weighing a hundred talents. From the proceeds of this dekadrachms (ten drachma pieces) were struck in celebration of the victory. These superb coins are as yet unrepresented in the Museum's collection. Their types, however, were reproduced on the contemporary tetradrachms, an example of which is shown above (No. 28). In the exergue under the chariot is a lion, a symbol of the African foe, and on the head on the reverse the

simple, beaded fillet is replaced by a wreath of olive, in token of the victory.

Some of the smaller denominations are also represented in the collection by examples belonging to the time of Gelon. The reverse type is similar to that of the tetradrachms (Nos. 8 and 26). The didrachm has on the obverse (No. 12) a horseman leading a second horse, which is indicated merely in outline. On the drachma (No. 26) the second horse is appropriately omitted. The litra, a coin belonging to a native Sicilian standard and equivalent to a fifth of a drachma, has a cuttle-fish on the reverse (No. 27), the female head being placed on the obverse.

Since the *Demareteion* is dated accurately at the close of Gelon's reign, it enables us to distinguish his coins from those of his brother and successor, Hieron (478-467). Those which are more archaic in style belong to Gelon; those which are more advanced must be assigned to Hieron. The coinage of the latter is further identified by a new symbol. The *pistrix* or sea monster appearing in the exergue on the obverse (No. 35) doubtless typifies the Etruscans, whose naval power was crushed by Hieron in the great sea-fight near Cumae in 474 B. C. Eight of the twenty-five tetradrachms in the collection bearing this symbol are illustrated on the next page. The quadriga remains much the same; but the heads of the reverse show a marked advance both as regards beauty of conception and mastery of the technique of sculpture in relief. The archaic type, with its angular profile and heavy chin, gives way gradually to one more nearly approaching the ideal beauty of the great age. The eye, at first rendered as if seen from the front, comes, after a series of experiments, to be almost correctly placed. The hair, too, which in the former series was a simple mass with its separate strands conventionally



Tetradrachms of Hieron, 478-467 B. C.

indicated by rows of pellets or fine incised lines, is now treated in a more elaborate and realistic manner.

Some of the most advanced of these coins with the pistrix (e. g. Nos. 51 and 53) are perhaps to be dated somewhat later than 467 B. C. In the coins of the democracy, which was established soon after Hieron's death (Nos. 55-91), this development may be followed further. The four examples reproduced on the following page (Nos. 55, 63, 65 and 67) bring us down to the period from 440-430, in which two innovations are introduced: the artists begin to sign their dies, and there is an important change in the rendering of the quadriga on the obverse. One of the coins of Eumenes, the earliest of these known artists, is illustrated here (No. 76). The attempt to represent all the horses and to give them a livelier action is as yet hardly successful. The followers of Eumenes reached a better solution of the problem, showing the quadriga in full career. A new, sensational feature is introduced by Evænetos, the most famous Syracusan engraver, on some of these tetradrachms of his earlier period. The furthestmost horse is stumbling, his foreleg caught in a broken rein. On some examples the chariot is about to round the goal post, the two further horses appearing almost in three-quarter view (so on the unsigned coin, No. 91, where the broken rein also occurs and the chariot wheel on the ground hints at a more serious accident to one of the competitors). There can be no doubt as to the source from which these innovations came. Athens under Perikles had become the artistic centre of Greece, and the livelier types of horses are in all probability inspired by the frieze of the Parthenon. That these engravers did not neglect the reverse of their coins is shown by the two examples reproduced,

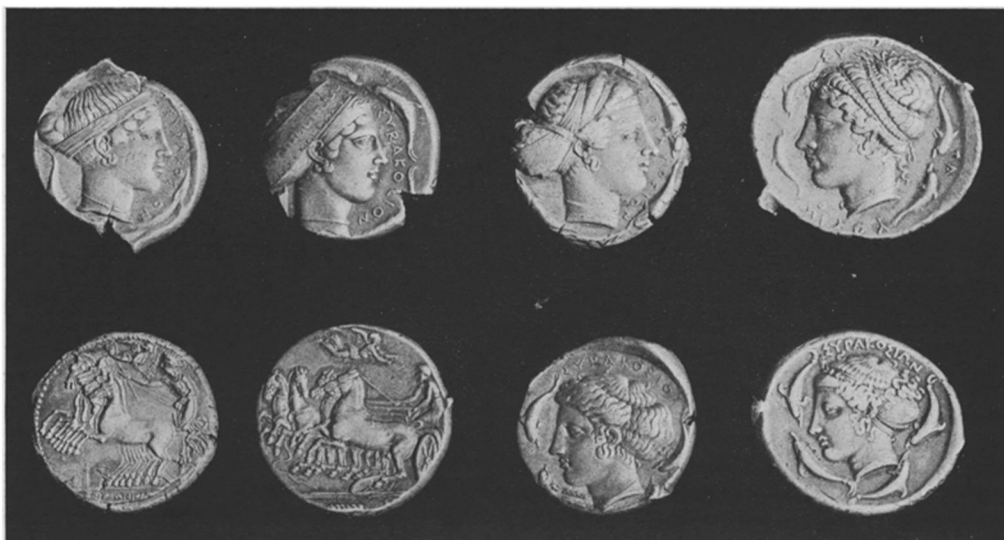
which bear the signatures of Eukleidas (No. 77) and Evænetos (No. 80).

In 415 B. C. the growing rivalry between Athens and Syracuse, due to the attempt of the former to extend her supremacy over the Sicilian cities, culminated in the great siege, which ended two years later in the annihilation of the remnants of the Athenian forces on the banks of the Assinaros. The story is familiar from the vivid account of Thucydides, written, as is natural, from the point of view of his vanquished countrymen. For the other point of view,—that of the triumphant Syracusans,—we must turn to their coins, especially to the new series of dekadrachms (Nos. 94-107). These seem to have been issued for the first time in connection with the games inaugurated in 412 B. C. on the anniversary of the victory, and called "Assinaria," from the river on whose banks the final conflict took place. As in the case of the *Demareteia*, the existing types were retained, the larger field, however, making possible a more elaborate treatment. The suit of armor in the exergue beneath the quadriga recalls the spoils



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Tetradrachm by Kimon

55
7663
9165
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80*Tetradrachms, 466-415 B. C.*

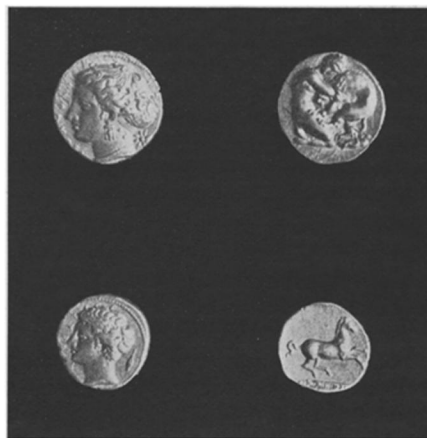
taken from the enemy, and the inscription, ἀθλα, "prizes," suggests that these were actually offered as prizes in the games. The earliest of the dekadrachms are signed by Kimon, an artist who worked also for some of the Greek cities in Italy (Nos. 94, 95, illustrated on the first page). The head, which now occupies the obverse, is identified as that of the fountain nymph Arethusa. On the tetradrachm by the same artist (No. 110), which is considered his masterpiece, the nymph is represented in full face, "the flowing locks suggesting, though they do not imitate, the bubbling action of the fresh-water spring which rises in the sea, here typified by the dolphins which sport round the head of the nymph."*

The dekadrachms continued to be issued through a long period of years, the later series (406-385 B. C.) being from the hand of Evānetos (Nos. 101 and 103). On them the head of Arethusa is replaced by an even more beautiful head identified by the wreath of barley as the goddess Persephone.

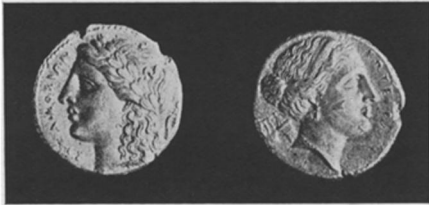
The coinage of gold, introduced at Syracuse towards the end of the fifth century, is represented in the collection by five examples (Nos. 69 to 73). The reverse of the five litra pieces (No. 71) has a small female head in the centre of an incuse square, evidently in imitation of the earliest silver coins (No. 2). The next group of gold coins, illustrated here by two specimens (Nos. 114 and 115), is contemporary with the dekadrachms, some examples being signed by Kimon and Evānetos. The reverse of the hundred litra piece is especially interesting since its design—Herakles wrestling with the Nemean lion—is exactly duplicated on a gem

found in Sicily. The latter is evidently a magistrate's signet bearing the official badge of the city.

In the Syracusan coins of the fourth and third centuries the decline of the art becomes increasingly apparent. The fine silver staters with Corinthian types (Nos. 122 and 123) have been connected with Timoleon, who was sent out from the mother city in 344 B. C. in response to an appeal by the Syracusans to restore order in the city. The electrum coins (Nos. 116 to 121) were certainly issued by him, and show that the Syracusan engravers were still able to produce new and beautiful types such as the heads of Apollo and Artemis here illustrated (No. 116). The same cannot be said of the coins of Agathokles (317-289 B. C.).

114
115114
115*Gold Coins, End of Fifth Century*

* Sir C. T. Newton.



116

Electrum Coin, Timoleon, 344-337 B. C.

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Hieron II, 275-216 B. C.

Some of his tetradrachms (Nos. 128 to 130) are mere imitations of the types of Evænetos' medallions. The head of Persephone on a small gold coin (No. 127) goes back to the same source. Nos. 131, 134, and 135 show the familiar Corinthian types. And the gold staters (Nos. 124, 125) are copied from those of Philip of Macedon. In the third century Alexandria under the Ptolemies became the centre of the Greek world. This is illustrated by a coin of Dionysius II (275-216 B. C.), the veiled head of his wife Philistis (No. 139) recalling some of the portraits on the Ptolemaic coins. The fall of Syracuse in 212 B. C., after the siege by the Romans under Metellus, and its incorporation two years later in the new Roman province of Sicily, brought to an end the independent coinage of gold and silver. The wooden figure of the huntress Artemis on one of the latest issues (No. 143) shows how little this fact is to be regretted.

The finest achievements of the Syracusan die engravers fall within the period represented by the objects exhibited in the Fifth Century Room. Each of these coins is in itself a work of art worthy to be shown here, and taken together they form the links of an unbroken chain testifying to the wonderful artistic activity throughout this greatest age of Greece. By the united verdict of antiquity and of modern times the medallions of Evænetos, which end the series, have been accorded the highest place. At first most of us will probably assent to this opinion, but on longer acquaintance the works of the earlier artists come to have a stronger appeal. In a collection such as this, where the same types are shown in all the phases of the development from restraint and convention to perfect freedom of representation, a comparison of details is instructive. The ideal beauty of the head of Persephone is not without a certain emptiness. One turns after a time with a sense of relief to the more individual features of Kimon's Arethusa, a work slightly earlier in style, or to the heads on the coins of Hieron, which give almost the impression of being portraits. The elaborate treatment of the hair on both series of dekadrachms reveals a conscious striving for effect. It is distinctly less pleasing than the simpler forms of head-dress on the earlier coins. As a composition

perfectly adapted to the circular field, the early tetradrachm of Gelon (No. 4) was never surpassed. The superiority of the dolphins on these earlier coins is also very marked. They are more lifelike both in their forms and in the manner in which they are disposed about the head. After the time of Hieron they are placed in pairs facing each other as meaningless ornaments introduced merely to fill the vacant space. What is true of the dolphins is still more true of the horses on the obverse. The spirited action of the team on the medallions is not to be denied, and at first glance the difficult problem of representing the four horses abreast seems to have been solved; but on closer inspection the hindlegs of the second horse are seen to be in an impossible position, planted side by side on the ground. The earlier artists were less ambitious, but more sincere. The horses on the coins of Gelon belong to a finer breed, and it is not inappropriate that the flying Victory is placing the wreaths upon their heads, while on the later coins she crowns the driver instead.

Such a comparison of details does not go far towards explaining the elusive charm of archaic and transitional Greek art; but this will come to be strongly felt by all who examine this series of Syracusan coins. Turning from them to the other objects exhibited in the room, one will perhaps understand and appreciate better the three-sided marble relief, the head of Artemis, and the relief of a horseman, and the still earlier works shown in the Archaic Room, such as the limestone head of a girl and the bronze statuettes in the central case.

L. D. C.



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215-212 B. C.